

January 21, 2025

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TESTIMONY ON SB234 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

**Housing and Community Development – Homeless Shelter Certification Program
– Establishment**

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Kathleen Makusky

My name is Kathleen Makusky. I am a resident of District 44A. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB234 for the establishment of a homeless shelter certification program.

As a resident of the State of Maryland, I understand and appreciate the value of the social programs offered in our state. I also understand that the programs offered can and should be continuously examined, expanded, and improved upon to better serve the greater community. I am in favor of SB234 because it provides a framework for minimum standards of care as well as protections for the residents of homeless shelters against potential abuse.

I have been fortunate enough to never need to access a homeless shelter, but I am keenly aware that many in Maryland do not have such luxury. I have heard stories and personal experiences about more and more people struggling to make ends meet, experiencing greater anxiety regarding financial insecurity, and of encountering abusive or indifferent systems when they were attempting to access needed services. People being turned away or discriminated against for racial, sexual orientation, gender identity or any number of protected statuses. While these institutions may operate under the best intentions, I am of the belief that increased certification requirements enforcing the best standards of care as well as a standardization of training for management will be a net positive for residents, staff, and the community at large. This bill can protect against abuse and prevent residents from having to make the impossible choice of seeking shelter in a place they feel unsafe in and having little recourse to address abuse, or forgoing housing completely.

Whether or not you are personally affected by housing insecurity, it is an issue that affects the community at large. One cannot in good conscience observe the suffering of others and not be moved to act in some way. This bill is a step forward in the right direction towards protecting the rights of vulnerable members of the community. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB234.**